

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

The listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF THE CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. (Currently Amended) A ceramic packing element ~~(1, 6, 8)~~ having comprising an essentially uniform cross-section along an axis ~~(A)~~ passing through a center ~~(C)~~ of the element and about which the element is symmetrical defining a length ~~(L)~~ of the element, ~~and characterized by:~~
a ratio of a width dimension ~~(W)~~ to the length ~~(L)~~ being from 1.5:1 to 5:1, and first and second concave external surfaces ~~(2, 3)~~ at the ends of height and width axes ~~(h, w)~~ respectively perpendicular to the length direction, said concave surfaces being connected by surfaces that are selected from convex surfaces ~~(4)~~ and convex surfaces ~~(4)~~ connected to the concave surfaces by relatively short intermediate flat surfaces ~~(7)~~, and the element being provided with at least three through passages ~~(5)~~ in the length direction, at least one of the passageways ~~(5e)~~ being kidney bean-shaped in cross-section, the kidney-bean shaped passageway having two generally parallel arcuate surfaces.
2. (Currently Amended) An element ~~(1, 8)~~ according to claim 1 in which the concave surfaces ~~(2, 3)~~ are connected directly to convex surfaces ~~(4)~~.
3. (Currently Amended) An element ~~(1, 6, 8)~~ according to Claim 1 or 2 in which width and height dimensions ~~(W, H)~~ of the element are unequal with the ratio of width to height being from 1.25:1 to 3:1.
4. (Currently Amended) An element ~~(1, 6, 8)~~ according to Claim 3 in which width and height dimensions ~~(W, H)~~ of the element are in a ratio of from about 1.3:1 to 2.0:1.
5. (Currently Amended) An element ~~(1, 6, 8)~~ according to ~~any one of Claims 1-4~~ Claim 1 in which the element is provided with from 3 to 275 passageways.

6. (Currently Amended) An element ~~(1, 6, 8)~~ according to ~~any one of Claims 1-5~~ Claim 1 in which at least a plurality of the passageways ~~(5a, 5b, 5c, 5d)~~ are round in cross-section and a diameter ~~(D)~~ of each round passage is less than about one half of the height ~~(H)~~ of the element.
7. (Currently Amended) An element ~~(1, 6)~~ according to Claim 6 in which the plurality of passageways ~~(5a, 5b, 5c, 5d)~~ have identical dimensions.
8. (Currently Amended) An element ~~(8)~~ according to ~~any one of Claims 1-4~~ Claim 1 in which the at least one kidney bean-shaped passageway ~~(5e)~~ has a largest dimension ~~(D)~~ which is up to about 2/3 of the height ~~(H)~~ of the element.
9. (Currently Amended) An element ~~(1, 6, 8)~~ according to ~~any one of Claims 1-4~~ Claim 1 in which a total cross-sectional area of the passages represents from 20 to 75% of the total cross-sectional area of the element.
10. (Currently Amended) An element ~~(1, 6, 8)~~ according to Claim 9 in which a total cross-sectional area of the passages represents from 30 to 67% of the total cross-sectional area of the element.
11. (Currently Amended) An element ~~(1, 6, 8)~~ according to ~~any one of Claims 1-4~~ Claim 1 in which the ceramic is a porous material.
12. (Currently Amended) An element ~~(8)~~ according to ~~any one of Claims 1-4~~ Claim 1 in which the passages include a plurality of second passages ~~(5a, 5c, 5d)~~ having a second shape, the at least one kidney bean-shaped passage being positioned intermediate at least one of the plurality of second of passages and the center of the element.
13. (Currently Amended) An element ~~(1, 6, 8)~~ according to ~~any one of Claims 1-4~~ Claim 1 in which a ratio of height to width of the element, H:L is from about 5:1 to 15:1.

14. (Currently Amended) An element ~~(8)~~ according to Claim 13 in which H:L is about 8:1.

15. (Currently Amended) A method of forming a bed of packing elements comprising:

- extruding a mixture comprising one or more ceramic-forming components;
- sectioning the extruded mixture to form sections;

- firing the sections to form packing elements ~~(1, 6, 8)~~, wherein each of the packing elements is characterized by first and second concave external surfaces ~~(2, 3)~~ at the ends of height and width axes ~~(h, w)~~ respectively perpendicular to a length direction ~~(L)~~, said concave surfaces being connected by surfaces that are selected from convex surfaces ~~(4)~~ and convex surfaces ~~(4)~~ connected to the concave surfaces by relatively short intermediate flat surfaces ~~(7)~~, a ratio of a width dimension ~~(W)~~ to the length ~~(L)~~ being from 1.5:1 to 5:1, and the element being provided with at least three through passages ~~(5)~~ in the length direction, at least one of the passageways ~~(5e)~~ being kidney bean-shaped in cross-section, the kidney-bean shaped passageway having two generally parallel arcuate surfaces;

- assembling a bed of packing elements which includes a plurality of the fired packing elements.

16. (New) An element according to Claim 1, wherein the kidney bean-shaped passageway includes a pair of kidney bean-shaped passages.

17. (New) A ceramic packing element having an essentially uniform cross-section along an axis defining a length of the element, the element including first and second opposed concave surfaces at ends of a height axis and third and fourth opposed concave surfaces at ends of a width axis, the element having a width greater than a height;

- a plurality of first passages extending through the element in the length direction;

- at least one second passage extending through the element in the length direction, the second passage having a shape different from the first passage, the second passage comprising first and second generally parallel surfaces and a height greater than a width.

18. (New) A ceramic packing element according to Claim 17, wherein one of the first passages is intermediate two second passages.

19. (New) A ceramic packing element according to claim 18, wherein the at least one second passage extends generally parallel with the length direction.